
Democratic Revolution

Background to the
New Society
of the Philippines

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MARTIAL LAW did not come about in the Philippines on the spur of the moment nor as the result of a sudden and precipitate decision. It developed as an urgent and compelling necessity after all other recourses had failed and after all likely alternatives had been tested or carefully considered.

The sequence of events leading to the proclamation of martial law on September 21, 1972, would indeed suggest that President Marcos had deliberated long and hard over this decision. A year earlier, on August 21, 1971, taking recourse in the extraordinary powers granted the Philippine President by the Constitution in times of national emergency, he had suspended the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus* in some parts of the Philippines. He had hoped then that by this act it would still be possible to thwart the Communist plan to overthrow the government of the Republic by force.

Under the Philippine Constitution it is the President who is specifically directed to decide when and how to use such extraordinary powers. This is clearly stated in Article VII, Section 10, Paragraph 2 of the Constitution.

The President shall be commander-in-chief of all armed forces of the Philippines and, whenever it becomes necessary, he may call out such armed forces to prevent or suppress lawless violence, invasion, insurrection, or rebellion. In case of invasion, insurrection, or rebellion, or imminent danger thereof, when the public safety requires it, he may suspend the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus*, or place the Philippines or any part thereof under martial law.

Looking back at the conditions that obtained at the time, the President said that on the basis of the Communist insurgency alone, he could have been justified in proclaiming martial law earlier.

The Supreme Court found sufficient cause to agree with President Marcos on the existence of an armed and organized conspiracy against the government in the mass of evidence that came under its critical scrutiny in the case of *Lansang et al vs. Garcia, etc.* and in which the constitutionality of the President's suspension of the writ was at issue. In its decision on the case, rendered December 11, 1971, the nation's highest tribunal concluded:

We entertain, therefore, no doubts about the existence of a sizable group of men who have publicly risen in arms to overthrow the government and have thus been and still are engaged in rebellion against the Government of the Philippines.

Recalling his action in suspending the writ, the President himself has observed: "It was my estimate that in two years, the Communists would have become so strong that not even the President of the Philippines would be able to solve the problem of subversion."

Because of his aversion to drastic and authoritarian recourses, the President hesitated up to the last inevitable moment to suspend the writ. Under him, the extraordinary powers granted by the Constitution were used sparingly and with sympathetic understanding. Only the leaders of those who had truly engaged in subversion were arrested and they were fairly treated.

On January 2, 1972, on the advice of both military and civil government officials, the President lifted the suspension of the writ. But, as widely feared, this merely afforded the Communist Party a chance to reinforce its ranks and to escalate the acts of violence, terrorism and subversion on which it had embarked in earnest. There were confirmed reports that the secessionist bands in Mindanao and Sulu in Southern Philippines were being infiltrated by Communist elements, that they were undertaking extensive military training for possible large-scale attacks against the government and that firearms in large quantity were being smuggled into the country through the southern backdoor from foreign sources.

KIDNAPINGS, robberies and other crimes and acts of violence became common not only in Manila but in other centers of population. There

were attempts to destroy vital public installations, like power plants and water supply, and other acts of terrorism and violence. The government, which succeeded in penetrating a clique of former Army officers who were conspiring to mount a *coup d'etat*, obtained incontestable proof of a plot to take over political power after the liquidation of the President.

There were intelligence reports, all confirmed, indicating that the village self-defense units, popularly known as the Barrio Self-Defense Units, had been infiltrated by subversives and that even communication lines of the government were being used by the rebels. An assassination plot against the President was uncovered, involving the participation of foreign explosives experts and criminal elements (American and British), and in which sophisticated weapons were to be used.

In Manila itself, violence and terrorism became widespread, with explosives the favorite weapons of the subversives. Crowded areas were bombed, resulting in casualties among innocent bystanders. Even the City Hall of Manila was not free from these attacks.

This was the general situation when on or about July 4 there occurred an incident which has since been described as the Digoyo Landing—involving the smuggling by the MV/*Karagatan* of about 3,500 firearms of the M-14 variety with corresponding ammunition, as well as medical and electronic supplies in the sitio of Digoyo, on the eastern side of Isabela Province facing the Pacific Ocean in Northern Luzon. The attempt was discovered before the firearms, ammunition and other equipment could be brought inland and distributed among the subversives. In the subsequent military operations, government forces were able to capture 900 rifles, some rockets and rocket launchers and radio equipment, as well as destroy some of the camps of the subversives in the jungles of the Sierra Madre in Isabela.

There had been confirmed successive landings south and north of the same area before the Digoyo incident, and admission came from no less than the captured enemy that the firearms, ammunition and other military supplies came from foreign sources—proof enough that the sub-

versives were depending not merely on domestic sources of supply but on foreign support as well.

The President's appeal to the political opposition party for a common stand against the Communist violent rebellion and subversion proved to no avail. Even offers of a possible bipartisan political leadership in the government fell on deaf ears. On the contrary, opposition party leaders tried and did manage to immobilize the National Security Council, the Republic's highest security body, of which they were also members, rendering it incapable of moving effectively against the subversives.

This left the President no other alternative than "to move along in the exercise of Presidential power with the counsel of my conscience," to put it in his own words. "It became quite clear to me," he said, "that the rightist conspiracy and the Communist rebellion had almost succeeded in rendering the government impotent to meet any crisis, that in fact this unholy combination, if given just the shortest time, would pronounce the death sentence on the Republic."

On September 21, 1972, a year after he suspended the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus*, the President signed Proclamation No. 1081 placing the entire Philippines under martial law.

In a statement made after the signing of Proclamation 1081, the President made it succinctly clear that the act did not connote a military takeover of civil government functions.

"I, as your duly elected President of the Republic, use this power implemented by the military authorities to protect the Republic of the Philippines and our democracy. A republican and democratic form of government is not a helpless government. When it is imperilled by the danger of a violent overthrow, insurrection and rebellion, it has inherent and built-in powers wisely provided for under the Constitution."

Such provision is Article VII, Section 10, Paragraph 2 of the 1935 Philippine Constitution, which was in effect at the time of the proclamation of martial law.

This provision sanctions the martial necessity without interjecting the supremacy of the military, as martial law is generally understood

and enforced in other countries. Martial law, Philippine style, continues to uphold the supremacy of the civil over the military, with the former continuing to give the orders and the latter charged with the task of implementing them. And, unless it is over crimes against the state, the civil courts continue to exercise jurisdiction over the entire legal system.

Thus, the Constitution places the proclamation of martial law under the rule of law; moreover, it provides both a legal and moral instrument for its own survival in a clear, orderly and democratic manner.

The immediate objective of martial law was to provide the instrument by which the government could act swiftly and decisively to meet the Communist threat, suppress rebellion and insurrection and remove the danger of imminent invasion.

WHEN President Marcos made the decision to launch what he has since privately called "the September 21 Movement," it was with the realization that the martial decision entailed much more than police action or saving the country by restoring peace and order.

Everyone recognized the legal basis for the martial necessity; this was the simplest thing of all. But, as a study of revolutions and ideologies proves, martial law could not, *in the long run*, secure the Philippine Republic unless the social inequities and old habits which precipitated the military necessity were stamped out.

Hence, the September 21 Movement, for martial rule to be of any lasting benefit to the people and the nation, to justify the national discipline, should inaugurate a movement for great, perhaps even drastic, reforms in all spheres of national life. Save the Republic, yes, but to keep it safe, we have to start the remaking of society.

The President has gone on further to point out

"The fundamental reason for building a new society has to do, in fact, with the outstanding characteristic of our age: the rebellion of the poor. This is a rebellion over which the might of government can have no avail, for the poor are in many ways *the people*, for which governments exist."

Martial law is a temporary Constitutional expedient of safeguarding the Republic. By its very nature, it *imposes*, rather than encourages and *nurtures*. A new society cannot emerge out of sheer imposition or command. At the most,

then, martial law provides a transition between the old and the new society.

The ills of the old society are varied and deep-rooted. Reforms cannot come about overnight. The changes, to be meaningful and enduring, must necessarily be revolutionary, requiring no less than the exercise of extraordinary powers to bring them about. This is the rationale of the continuance of martial law, even if the immediate objective of restoring law and order appears to have been achieved.

In this sense, martial law takes on a unique character in the Philippines: not the dubious and untenable strategy of merely protecting or restoring the status quo, but a militant, Constitutional and legal device for creating and building a new society from the ashes of the old one.

THE RIGHT to rebel is an elemental human right, just as the right to repress or suppress rebellion is an elemental public right. Such an inherent right of the people is recognized by democracy, the only form of government that does so. Under a democracy, the people have a right to cast out their leaders, change their policy or otherwise effect radical reforms, by force if necessary, when the legal vehicles for bringing out such reforms have become impotent, inadequate or corrupted.

On the other hand, the Constitution grants special powers to the government through the President to suppress rebellion. For it is an altogether different matter when it is merely a minority agitating for reforms and taking recourse to armed revolution to carry out their purpose of overthrowing the legal authority.

There are two kinds of revolution. There is the more commonly known type which seeks to liquidate an entire ruling class in order to establish a new social order. This is called the Jacobin type and derives its name from the Jacobin Party of the French Revolution. The other type is the Liberal Revolution, which is carried out by the assimilation of the revolutionary classes into the existing order.

In short, these two distinct and varying approaches divide into the Constitutional

(Liberal) and armed (Jacobin) struggles, or into peaceful and violent revolutions.

The common belief is that revolutions can only proceed from the people, that a government cannot, by itself, initiate a revolution. This is because, it is said, a government cannot revolt against itself, that there can never be a "revolution from above."

This is a fallacious doctrine, as history has proved. A case in point was the English ruling class of the eighteenth century which sharply contrasted with the French nobility of about the same period. Where the French nobility was inept, corrupt and immoral and deserved to be overthrown, as indeed it was overthrown, by a people united in revolution, the English ruling class constituted a political authority that recognized the need for reforms and responded to popular demands, taking the lead in directing the people's aspirations.

Government in a democracy stands at the center—not above—the political community. It is around this concept that Philippine democracy was built up, constituting as it did the dream of the Philippine Revolution of 1896, and evolved under American colonialism. Under this doctrine—that *the people is all*—the government does not conceive of itself as the head or the apex of the national community but rather the core—"a power center surrounded by the people, to whom it proposes and whom it leads—standing *in front* of them but *not above them*," to put it in the President's own words.

A democratic government is obliged to make itself the faithful instrument of the people's revolutionary aspirations. This is the concept of a revolution from the center, a democratic revolution such as we are witnessing in the Philippines today.

OUR THEORY of the Democratic Revolution is based on the fundamental concept of human freedom, a theory founded on the people's inherent right to revolution which is recognized only by democratic governments. It is a Liberal Revolution, moreover, because it seeks to democratize an existing social order without violence but achieving nevertheless its ends by Constitutional and legal means.

Our Democratic Revolution, derived from a general theory, is also Filipino in concept and inspiration. It is faithful to our historical aspirations and experience and rooted in the historical demands of the Filipino people which gained full expression in the Revolution of 1896.

In many ways, we are still waging this revolutionary struggle. The Filipino propagandists and ideologues of the last century summed up the aims and demands of this struggle in the desire for a political authority that would be the instrument of the national liberation, the promoter of the people's intellectual and moral development and their economic and social well-being. In a word, they envisioned a society based on moral principles, governing in turn the people's economic and social relationships.

This is the theory of our Democratic Revolution—it is Constitutional, liberal, nationalist.

It is for the people that government has embarked on a Democratic Revolution: to alter or transform society. President Marcos himself had said that the fundamental reason for building a new society had to do with the *rebellion of the poor*. "This is a rebellion over which the might of government can have no avail," he said, "for the poor are in many ways *the people*, for which governments exist."

Again, the term "the people." Just exactly what do we mean by "the people"? Various writers, thinkers and philosophers have given it as many and differing meanings. When we speak of popular sovereignty, do we mean The People as voters, or the People as the entire nation?

The Philippine definition goes beyond merely bracketing The People with the entire living population but with all their predecessors and successors, with the entire historic stream of generations that are *The Filipino People*.

When we talk of The People, we mean the Filipinos who exist not only in the urgent present but in all our history—those who came before us and those who will come after us, the generations which are, in their totality, *The Filipino People*.

This high moral consciousness is the guiding spirit of our Democratic Revolution as it reaches out for a new society. □

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